

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4707

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

CINCPAC

USFJ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TOKYO 16002

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, JA

SUBJECT: MIKI CHALLENGE IN THE OFFING?

SUMMARY: THE NEXT FEW WEEKS ARE LIKELY TO PROVIDE THOSE
SEEKING TO OVERTHROW MIKI WITH THEIR BEST OPPORTUNITY FOR
MONTHS TO COME. IF THEY AVAIL DURING THIS PERIOD, MIKI SEEMS
ALMOST CERTAIN SOON THEREAFTER TO CALL A GENERAL ELECTION
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WHICH WOULD CONFIRM HIM IN POWER, POSSIBLY UNTIL JANUARY

1978. THAT WOULD SERIOUSLY JEOPARDIZE THE CHANCES OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA AND FINMIN OHIRA TO BE PRIME MINISTER AND PROBABLY ELIMINATE FROM CONSIDERATION THE HANDFUL OF LDP ELDERS, SUCH AS LDP VICE PRESIDENT SHIINA.

IF THEY DECIDE TO MOVE, MIKI'S RIVALS WILL ATTEMPT TO CALL INTO QUESTION MIKI'S "LEADERSHIP." TO DO SO THEY WILL SEEK TO DISCREDIT HIS RECORD TO DATE, LOOK FOR ADVERSE DEVELOPMENTS AT THE ECONOMIC SUMMIT, AND HOPE FOR MISHANDLING OF CURRENT LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS AND THE PENDING STRIKE RIGHT CONTROVERSY.

IF THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL IN CREATING A LEADERSHIP "CRISIS," MIKI COULD BE TOPPLED. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE ODDS NOW DEFINITELY FAVOR MIKI'S SURVIVAL, GIVEN THE CONTINUING ROUGH BALANCE OF STRENGTH BETWEEN HIS MAIN RIVALS, FUKUDA AND OHIRA, AND BUILDING GENERAL ELECTION SENTIMENT LIKELY SOON TO BE IRRESISTIBLE.

IN THE MEANTIME, MIKI AND HIS OPPONENTS WILL BE LOOKING FOR ANY AMMUNITION WHICH WILL HELP. THE AMERICAN CONNECTION IS SO IMPORTANT, THAT THEY WILL BE QUICK TO MAXIMIZE ANY PERCEIVED SPECIAL AMERICAN ATTENTION OR DIFFERENCE. WE SHOULD, OF COURSE, BE AWARE OF THIS SITUATION AND GIVE NO INDICATION OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT MIKI'S DURABILITY IN EITHER TOKYO OR WASHINGTON. UNDERSTANDABLY, THE DOMESTIC STRUGGLE WILL DOMINATE THE THINKING OF MIKI AND OTHER LEADERS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, MAKING IT HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL SAY OR DO ANYTHING WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY OPEN THEM TO CRITICISM. END SUMMARY.

1. THE TOKYO POLITICAL WORLD IS CURRENTLY AWASH WITH SPECULATION ABOUT A POSSIBLE "CRISIS" LEADING TO PRIME MINISTER MIKI'S DOWNFALL. THE SPECULATION BUILDS ON CONTINUING WIDESPREAD UNHAPPINESS WITH MIKI'S POLITICAL STANCE AND STYLE INSIDE THE LDP AND INCREASING AGREEMENT THAT A GENERAL (LOWER HOUSE) ELECTION EXPECTED SOON WOULD CONFIRM MIKI IN POWER FOR SOME TIME TO COME. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE LATTER IS AMOST UNHAPPY PROSPECT FOR AGING CONTENTENDERS FOR THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP--PARTICULARLY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FUKUDA. (HE IS KEENLY AWARE OF THE JAPANESE POLITICAAL MAXIM THAT AGE 70 IS THOUGHT TO BE THE CUTOFF FOR PRIME MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES.) THUS INTER-FACTIONAL CONSULTATIONS IS UNUSUALLY INTENSE ENCOURAGING SPECULATION THAT A MIKI CHALLENGE IS IN THE OFFING.

2. THE POSSIBLE CHALLENGERS. MOTIVATED BY SHARPENED AMBITION INDUCED BY "NOW OR NEVER" SCENARIO BUILDING, MIKI'S RIVALS AND THEIR PRINCIPAL SUPPORTERS ARE:

--DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TAKEO FUKUDA: AT 69, THIS COULD BE HIS LAST CHANCE. A MIKI ELECTION SUCCESS WOULD SERIOUSLY JEOPARDIZE ANY PROSPECT OF THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP FOR HIM. SUPPORT FOR HIS CANDIDACY WITHIN THE LDP NOW APPEARS TO BE GAINING GROUND AND RUNNING SIGNIFICANTLY AHEAD OF THAT FOR ARCH-RIVAL OHIRA. WITH A GENERAL ELECTION IN PROSPECT, FUKUDA MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO BELIEVE THAT IF MIKI'S LEADERSHIP CAN BE SUFFICIENTLY CALLED INTO QUESTION, THE LDP WOULD AT LAST TURN TO HIM.

-- FINANCE MINISTER MASAYOSHI OHIRA: AT 64, TIME IS NOT SO PRESSING, ONLY AMBITION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A PERMANENT LOSER'S IMAGE. THE TANAKA FACTION STILL PROVIDES ESSENTIAL SUPPORT. BUT, THROUGH A NUMBER OF PERCEIVED FAILURES OF NERVE, TACTICS OR ACUMEN, OHIRA'S STOCK HAS FALLEN INSIDE THE PARTY. HIS STRATEGY REMAINS, HOWEVER, TO FORCE A PARTY CONVENTION VOTE FOR THE LDP PRESIDENCY (AND PRIME MINISTERSHIP) WHERE PRESUMABLY HIS CHANCES ARE GREATEST. CONCEIVABLY A "CRISIS" COULD LEAD TO THAT VOTE.

-- FORMER PRIME MINISTER KAKUEI TANAKA. AT 57, TANAKA CONTINUES TO PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE AS LEADER OF THE PARTY'S LARGEST FACTION (NEARLY 25 PERCENT OF ALL LDP DIET MEMBERS). UNTIL RECENTLY HIS SUPPORT FOR OHIRA'S CANDIDACY--AND THAT OF HIS FACTION--WAS TAKEN FOR GRANTED. NOW THERE ARE SIGNS THAT HIS FACTION MEMBERS ARE

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INCREASINGLY DISAFFECTED WITH OHIRA--SOME ARE NOW EVEN SAID TO SUPPORT FUKUDA--AND TANAKA'S OWN SUPPORT FOR OHIRA IS QUESTIONED. TANAKA'S MAIN INTERESTS ARE PROTECTING HIMSELF (AND HIS FRIENDS) FROM CRIMINAL PROSECUTION AND PROMOTING PROSPECTS FOR AN EVENTUAL RETURN TO RESPECTABILITY AND PERHAPS POWER. A VINDICTIVE FINANCE MINISTER (CONTROLLING THE TAX BUREAU) OR THE PREDOMINANCE OF LONG TIME ENEMY FUKUDA COULD MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT FOR HIM.

-- LDP SEC GEN YASUHIRO NAKASONE: AT 57, HE CAN AFFORD TO BIDE HIS TIME. HIS INTERESTS WOULD BEST BE SERVED BY A "TEMPORARY" REGIME SUCH AS MIKI'S WHICH HE NOW SUPPORTS, OR THAT OF ONE OF THE OTHER "COMPROMISE" CANDIDATES. HIS PRESENT POSITION OF LDP

SECRETARY GENERAL, ADMINISTERING THE LDP AND SERVING
AS FORMAL CHANNEL FOR BUSINESS FUNDS TO THE PARTY,
SUITS HIM FINE.

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4708

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 TOKYO 16002

-- "COMPROMISE" CANDIDATES: THERE ARE A GROUP OF
LDP ELDERS STANDING BETWEEN FUKUDA AND OHIRA WHO MIGHT
SERVE AS COMPROMISE CANDIDATES, AS MIKI DOES. DESPITE
OCCASIONAL DENIALS, THESE MEN ARE NOT IMMUNE TO PRIME
MINISTERIAL AMBITIONS. THE CANDIDACY OF EACH, HOWEVER,
IS BELIEVED TO BE FLAWED. LDP VICE PRESIDENT ETSUSABURO
SHIINA (76), THE FRONT RUNNER IN THIS GROUP, IS WIDELY

CONSIDERED TO BE TOO OLD AND IN ILL HEALTH. FORMER
FUKUDA FACTION PILLAR SHIGERU HORI (73) HAD REPORTEDLY
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RUINED HIS CHANCES BY HIS ALIENATION OF FUKUDA. LDP
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL CHAIRMAN HIROKICHII NADAO (74) IS
VIGOROUS ENOUGH, BUT HIS TIES WITH THE RIGHTIST
"SPRING STORM SOCIETY" (SEIRANKAI) ARE THOUGHT TO BE
DISQUALIFYING. LOWER HOUSE SPEAKER SHIGESABURO MAEO
(69) IS RULED OUT ON HEALTH GROUNDS. UPPER HOUSE SPEAKER
KENZO KONO (73) PRESUMABLY ENDED HIS CHANCES BY
ANTAGONIZING POWERFUL LDP INTERESTS IN HIS SUCCESSFUL
1971 BID FOR UPPER HOUSE PRESIDENT. (IT IS WELL TO
REMEMBER, HOWEVER, THAT MIKI HIMSELF WOULD NORMALLY BE
RULED OUT FOR HIS LIBERAL STANCE WITHIN THE PARTY AND
HIS INDIVIDUALISTIC STYLE).

3. MIKI'S STRATEGY. SINCE HIS SETBACK IN THE FINAL
HOURS OF THE REGULAR DIET SESSION IN EARLY JULY, MIKI
HAS SOUGHT TO MOLLIFY THE MORE CONSERVATIVE BULK OF THE
LDP. THE "KOREA CLAUSE" FORMULATION WHICH EMERGED DURING
THE U.S. VISIT SERVED THIS PURPOSE. SO DID HIS
ACQUIESCENCE IN RESUMED MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES WITH
SOUTH KOREA AND AIR TIES WITH TAIWAN. WHILE CONTINUING
TO REFER TO "DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION" WITH THE

OPPOSITION, HE HAS ALSO GONE ALONG WITH THE STEAMROLLER
TACTICS MORE CHARACTERISTIC OF LDP DIET OPERATING STYLE.
STRESSING PARTY UNITY IN FREQUENT MEETINGS WITH LDP
ELDERS, HE HAS ALSO AGREED TO SHELVE TEMPORARILY THE
LEGISLATIVE ISSUES WHICH DEEPLY DIVIDE THE PARTY,
PARTICULARLY THE ANTI-MONOPOLY BILL AND TO A LESSER
EXTENT NPT RATIFICATION. ON THE EQUALLY CONTROVERSIAL
STRIKE RIGHT ISSUE, HE HAS SAID ONLY THAT HE HOPES TO
PROVIDE AN EARLY ANSWER.

4. BUT THE MAIN ELEMENT IN THE MIKI STRATEGY IS
CALLING AND "WINNING" A GENERAL ELECTION. MIKI CANNOT
CALL AN ELECTION WITHOUT THE APPROVAL OF THE ENTIRE
CABINET AND SOME MEMBERS MIGHT NOW REFUSE TO AGREE.
BUT IF AN ELECTION WERE CALLED AND, AS IS NOW EXPECTED
THE LDP WERE TO WIN 280 SEATS MORE OR LESS, THE LDP
PERFORMANCE WOULD BE CONSIDERED CREDITABLE UNDER THE
CIRCUMSTANCES. MIKI WOULD RECEIVE HIS POPULAR MANDATE
MAKING IT DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR HIS RIVALS
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TO SEEK TO REPLACE HIM FOR MONTHS THEREAFTER. THE ODDS WOULD INCREASE MARKEDLY THAT MIKI WOULD BE ABLE TO FINISH HIS THREE YEAR TERM, ENDING JANUARY 1978.

5. PRESSURES TO ACT. IT IS THIS PROSPECT WHICH ENCOURAGES SERIOUS RISK TAKING BY THOSE SUCH AS FUKUDA, WHOSE OPPORTUNITY TO BE PRIME MINISTER COULD BE IRRETRIEVABLY LOST. THESE MEN, ACTING MORE OR LESS DIRECTLY DEPENDING ON THE CLOSENESS OF THEIR CURRENT RELATIONSHIP TO MIKI, ARE INTENT ON PREVENTING AN ELECTION FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. ONE MEANS OF DOING SO, A CABINET SHUFFLE, HAS NOW BEEN LOST. THUS, VARIOUS MEANS OF BLOCKING A MIKI DIET DISSOLUTION ORDER (WHICH CONSTITUTIONALLY REQUIRES APPROVAL OF THE ENTIRE CABINET) ARE UNDER CONSIDERATION. BUT THAT IS NOT ENOUGH. THEY MUST ALSO HAVE A PLAUSIBLE REASON FOR MOVING AGAINST MIKI.

6. ON THIS SCORE, THE CHALLENGERS ARE ENCOURAGED BY A POSSIBLE COINCIDENCE OF EVENTS BEFORE MID-DECEMBER WHICH COULD BE FAVORABLE. FIRST, MIKI'S POPULAR SUPPORT IS DECLINING, MAINLY AS A RESULT OF AN INCREASING IMAGE OF INDECISIVENESS. SECOND, THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT EVENTS AT THE MID-NOVEMBER PARIS SUMMIT WHICH COULD BE USED TO CALL INTO QUESTION MIKI'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS ABILITY. THIRD, IS THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER UPPER HOUSE FAILURE TO PASS THE THREE PRICE PROPOSALS. FOURTH, THE POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE STRIKE ISSUE MAY BECOME UNMANAGEABLE. IN ADDITION, THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, IN THE EXPECTATION OF A YEAREND GENERAL ELECTION, ARE NOW RANGED MORE OR LESS SOLIDLY AGAINST MIKI. EACH OF THESE ISSUES COMING SEPARATELY WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE SUFFICIENT TO CHALLENGE MIKI, BUT TAKEN TOGETHER ANTI-MIKI PEOPLE HOPE THEY WILL BE ENOUGH.

7. THE CHALLENGERS APPARENTLY DO NOT YET HAVE A DETAILED NOTION AS TO PRECISELY HOW THEY MIGHT MOVE AGAINST MIKI. IF THEY DECIDE TO, THEY MUST CONVINCE OTHERS OF THE "FAILURE" OF MIKI LEADERSHIP. DEPENDING ON EVENTS, MEDIA HANDLING AND THE RESULTANT "MOOD," THEY MIGHT

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SEEK TO PRECIPITATE A CABINET CRISIS THROUGH RESIGNATIONS (E.G., OF OHIRA, IF THE PRICE HIKE BILLS FAIL AGAIN) OR REBELLION (E.G., REFUSAL TO SIGN A DISSOLUTION ORDER). ALTERNATIVELY, THEY MIGHT SIMPLY FORGE A CONSENSUS AMONG THE LDP LEADERSHIP THAT MIKI, BECAUSE OF

HIS "FAILURES," MUST GO. EITHER WAY, MIKI WOULD BE FORCED TO RESIGN. PRESUMABLY, BUT NOT ASSUREDLY, IN THE INCREASINGLY EMOTIONAL ATMOSPHERE, THERE WOULD BE AGREEMENT ON A MIKI SUCCESSOR BEFORE HIS RIVALS ATTEMPTED TO BRING HIM DOWN.

8. THE LIKELY OUTCOME. IF MIKI'S LEADERSHIP IS SERIOUSLY CALLED INTO QUESTION, WE FORESEE THREE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES. FIRST, AND MOST LIKELY, MIKI WOULD BE ABLE TO SURMOUNT THE CRISIS AND SOON THEREAFTER CALL AN ELECTION. SECOND, AND CONSIDERABLY LESS LIKELY, ONE OF THE OTHER COMPROMISE CANDIDATES, SUCH AS SHIINA, WOULD REPLACE HIM. THIRD, AND QUITE UNLIKELY IN OUR VIEW, FUKUDA WOULD BE ABLE TO ASSEMBLE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO OUST MIKI THROUGH INTRA-PARTY BARGAINING. WE WOULD ALSO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A BRIEF PERIOD WITHOUT EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOLLOWING AN OUSTER ATTEMPT.

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4709

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

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9. THESE JUDGMENTS PROCEED FROM OUR ESTIMATE THAT THE ROUGH BALANCE OF STRENGTH BETWEEN FUKUDA AND OHIRA CONTINUES. IF FUKUDA FORCES HAVE GAINED RECENTLY, CALLING INTO QUESTION OHIRA'S CHANCES OF TAKING POWER, WE BELIEVE OHIRA AND TANAKA FORCES ARE STILL UNWILLING TO SEE FUKUDA TAKE POWER AND HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH STRENGTH TO PREVENT IT. IN THIS CIRCUMSTANCE, MIKI HIMSELF REMAINS IN THE STRONGEST RELATIVE POSITION BUT SHOULD SOMETHING HAPPEN TO HIM, OTHERS, PARTICULARLY SHIINA AND HORI, COULD NOT BE RULED OUT ALTOGETHER. THUS WHILE
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FUKUDA'S RECENT GAINS MAY BE SUFFICIENT TO ENCOURAGE HIM (INDIRECTLY) TO PROMOTE A CRISIS, WE DO NOT BELIEVE HE WILL BE ABLE TO CAPITALIZE ON IT.

10. WITH LDP SECGEN NAKASONE'S SUPPORT, IT NOW SEEMS LIKELY THAT MIKI MAY BE ABLE TO MANAGE THE ISSUES SO AS TO DISCOURAGE A CHALLENGE ALTOGETHER. THE PARIS SUMMIT IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO IMPROVE HIS IMAGE THROUGH CONTINUING FRONT PAGE EXPOSURE AS ONE OF THE FREE WORLD'S LEADERS. THE UPPER HOUSE IS LIKELY TO PASS THE PRICE HIKE BILLS (TOKYO 14321), AND THERE APPEARS TO BE SUFFICIENT LATITUDE TO DELAY A DECISION ON THE STRIKE ISSUE OR EVADE RESPONSIBILITY (TOKYO 15643). IN ADDITION, EARLY DECEMBER FIRST YEAR MIKI MEDIA EVALUATIONS WILL BE FAVORABLE. MOREOVER DURING THIS TIME, PRESSURES FOR LOWER HOUSE DISSOLUTION AND A GENERAL ELECTION, CONFIRMING MIKI IN POWER, WILL LIKELY PROVE IRRESTIBLE (TOKYO 14698).

11. A CRITICAL PERIOD. EVENTS OF THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WILL BE WEIGHTED CAREFULLY FOR POSSIBLE USE AS AMMUNITION FOR OR AGAINST MIKI. THE IMPORTANCE OF JAPAN'S AMERICAN CONNECTION MAKES IT LIKELY THAT THE CONTENDERS WOULD SEEK TO MAXIMIZE ANY PERCEIVED SPECIAL AMERICAN ATTENTION OR DIFFERENCE. THESE SENSIBILITIES SHOULD, OF COURSE, GUIDE OUR DEALINGS WITH THESE MEN ON PROTOCOL AS WELL AS SUBSTANTIVE MATTERS. AT THE SAME TIME, WE SHOULD AVOID ANY SUGGESTION THAT WE HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT MIKI'S DURABILITY.

12. FOR THEIR PART, WE CAN EXPECT THE CONTENDERS--
WHETHER IN PARIS OR TOKYO--TO SAY AND DO

THINGS WITH AN EYE MAINLY FOR THIS STRUGGLE. THUS
DURING THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WE SHOULD TAKE JAPANESE
PRONOUNCEMENTS AS MORE THAN NORMALLY ORIENTED TOWARD
DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND EXPECT JAPANESE
LEADERS TO AVOID ANY COMMITMENT WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY
OPEN THEM TO CRITICISM BY THEIR OPPONENTS.
SHOESMITH

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